

Type of
indigenous
Lou-lan
people.

The contents of these graves were few but remarkably well preserved, thanks to the absolute dryness of the climate and the elevation of the site. They suffice to establish the fact that those who tenanted the small look-out post on the top of the Mesa belonged to the indigenous population of Lou-lan. What the appearance of the dead, their dress, and buried belongings disclose as to the type and civilization of this population is in striking agreement with the information which the Former Han Annals have preserved of the people of Lou-lan, as the Chinese found them on the first opening of the route through the desert.¹² There can be no doubt that the men whose figures made so life-like a reappearance from these graves belonged to a people who, like the Lopliks down to our times, lived the semi-nomadic life of herdsmen, fishermen and hunters. In spite of the traffic and trade that Chinese enterprise had brought to the jungles and marshes where they hunted, fished, and grazed their herds, they had evidently clung to their time-honoured ways and retained their distinct, if primitive, civilization. I greatly regret that the circumstances made it quite impossible to remove these mummified representatives of the old Lou-lan population. Even if we had disposed of sufficient time to improvise suitable cases from what ancient timber was at hand, no transport could have been spared to carry them with us to the land of the living. So I had to rest content with having the coffins carefully closed and the graves filled in again, putting blocks of clay on the top, to ward off as long as possible the ravages of wind-erosion.

Finds of
bronze and
stone
objects.

The general impression left on my mind by the bodies which our 'Ketmans' had for a brief space restored to the light of the sun was strikingly confirmed by the significant juxtaposition of the bronze objects and stone implements picked up on the slope below the little stronghold and in the immediate vicinity of the Mesa (L.F. 06-10, 015-27). Among the former were fragments of two bronze mirrors, L.F. 06-7 (Pl. XXIV), undoubtedly of Chinese workmanship; several bronze rings, L.F. 09-10 (Pl. XXIV), 015, &c. The stone implements comprised, besides a jasper blade, L.F. 024, and a piece of indeterminate use, L.F. 026, the well-finished (jade?) celt, L.F. 025, with a finely ground edge. Taken in conjunction with similar indications elsewhere, this collocation suggested that the interval separating the latest Neolithic period in the Lou-lan region from the advent of the Chinese may not have been a very protracted one. On the other hand, nine Chinese copper coins, all of the *Wu-chu* type, among them several small much-clipped pieces, which were picked up close to the foot of the Mesa, make it appear very probable that the occupation of L.F. continued as long as the desert route towards Tun-huang remained in use.

Remains on
Mesa L.I.

While engaged on our work at L.F. I had dispatched Afrāz-gul with a couple of men to reconnoitre an isolated Mesa which our glasses showed rising amidst low Yārdangs and *shōr* at a distance of about four miles to the north-east (Map No. 32. A. 3). The small relics, including stone implements, fragments of bronze, pottery, &c., that he had picked up there,¹³ besides what was evidently the refuse from a herdsmen's station, left no doubt that this spot, too, had seen ancient occupation. Our plane-table showed that the Lou-lan site L.A., the cemetery L.C., the Chinese *castrum* L.E., the little fortified post L.F., and finally this once occupied Mesa (L.I., as I subsequently marked it), all lay along what was practically a straight line leading due north-east. It seemed a clear indication that the ancient Chinese route I was anxious to trace onwards had followed the same direction. Thus the discoveries made since leaving our base at the Lou-lan station, apart from their direct interest, had a great practical importance for me. They furnished a safe starting-point and some guidance for the difficult task still before us, that of tracing the line of that famous old 'route of the centre' through the forbidding wastes eastwards.

Direction of
ancient
route.

Return to
L.A. base.

But to set out for it at once was a physical impossibility. The camels I had ordered to rejoin me at our Lou-lan base camp by February 17th were sure to be in need of some days' grazing at

¹² Cf. Wylie, 'Notes on the Western Regions', *J. Anthropol. Inst.*, x. p. 25; *Serindia*, i. p. 335.

¹³ See in the List below, p. 289, the entries marked L.I. 01-18.